
U.S. Congressman Jim Cooper

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COOPER PROPOSES 'SUPPORT OUR TROOPS' AMENDMENT

—on party-line vote, Budget Committee rejects amendment
to provide reserves equal access to health benefits and other improved troop benefits

NASHVILLE—Citing the increasing demands on America's armed forces, U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper introduced an amendment that called on Congress to significantly improve military benefits. Cooper introduced the "Support Our Troops" amendment yesterday during Budget Committee consideration of the proposed 2005 Budget Resolution. The amendment was rejected on a party-line vote.

The "Support Our Troops" amendment guaranteed reservists equal access to TRICARE, the military health benefits program, as well as increased imminent danger pay, family separation pay, targeted pay raises, funding for education programs for military schoolchildren and military family assistance centers.

The bill's \$2.5 billion cost would be paid for by slight reductions in tax cuts for individuals making \$1 million or more a year. The proposed tax cuts would save the U.S. Treasury about \$30 billion. Individuals making \$1 million or more would still receive an average tax cut of \$105,800.

"I take my responsibilities as a member of both the House Budget and Armed Services Committees very seriously," Cooper said. "I am worried about the growing deficit but I am also absolutely committed to making sure our troops have the support they need. The 4,000 men and women of Tennessee's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment are preparing for Iraq deployment. I think they deserve to know that their needs, and those of their families, will be taken care of while they are far away from home and loved ones."

Cooper said he is particularly concerned about the need to provide reservists full access to TRICARE. "Nearly 40 percent of the U.S. forces transitioning into Iraq are reservists," Cooper said. "Providing all reservists access to health benefits is a moral obligation, but it is also a military readiness issue. When all reservists are able to benefit from TRICARE, we improve the health and readiness of our reserve forces."

The 2005 Budget Resolution is expected to come before the full House in two weeks.

Cooper said he will continue to push for improved military benefits and lifestyle concerns through other legislative measure in the coming months.

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